RNA FOR A BETTER LIFE IN THE HEIGHTS

RIVERVIEW Neighborhood Association

May, 1992

232 Ogden Avenue - Jersey City, N.J. 07307 - (201) 798-0493

RNA IS NOT AFFILIATED WITH ANY POLITICAL PARTY, ORGANIZATION OR ELECTED OFFICIAL

MEETING MINUTES

The April meeting of RNA was not as well attended as was hoped when the meeting night was changed from Friday to Tuesday, so Chairwoman Maria Tuzzo opened by reminding everyone to spread the word that we meet on a new night. So here's my reminder: RNA NOW MEETS THE SECOND TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH AT 7:30 PM. The next meeting will be held May 12th at the Harbor View Health Care Center.

The first item on the agenda was filling the vacant Vice-Chairperson position. Ernest Quintero was nominated, he accepted the nomination and was unanimously approved by the RNA members present. Congratulations to Ernie and thanks for filling a vital RNA post!

We then discussed the annual RNA Flea Market in Riverview Park. Because of renovations in the Park, and concern that the park would not be finished by the usual June date for the flea market, we voted to postpone the event until Saturday, September 12th, with Saturday, September 19th as the raindate.

Then Ernest Quintero came through for RNA a second time. The need for a Flea Market Coordinator was discussed, and Ernie volunteered. As Ernie put it, "The worst that can happen is I won't do it next year!" Many other RNA members signed-up as volunteers for the flea market. If you want to volunteer, please see Ernie at the May 12th meeting.

With that business out of the way, three members of the Palisade Avenue Association spoke about the City Council vote on the Christ Hospital parking proposal. Barbara Petrick, Tim Griffith, and Teresa Constantino led a discussion about the negative impact of the parking plan on the surrounding neighborhood, and about fears of a future, large scale expansion project by Christ Hospital, including multi-level parking garages. They urged RNA and its members to do all they can to fight the parking proposal. (The Council voted in favor of the proposal the next night, Wednesday, April 15th.)

RNA members then voted to sponsor Rebecca Everett and Mark Wilder in the New York Aids Walk on May 31st. RNA is donating $50.00 to the cause. To everyone's amazement, Treasurer Jack Rea voted "yes" on the expenditure, saying "When it's a good cause, I don't mind spending RNA's money."

[continued on page two]

POLICE RAID 210 OGDEN AVENUE AND FIND LARGE CACHE OF COCAINE

On Friday, April 24th, the federal Drug Enforcement Agency, along with members of the Jersey City police and investigators from both Hudson County and Essex County raided 210 Ogden Avenue. The agents found a kilo of pure cocaine with a street value of over $300,000. The also seized three fully loaded weapons: a sawed off shot-gun, a .22 caliber rifle with a scope and a .45 automatic pistol. Three Colombian nationals were arrested in this raid for alleged drug-dealing. One of them was Guillermo Rodriguez. He is better known in our neighborhood as William Rodriguez, one of the brothers who has operated the marble and stone factory at that address for approximately twenty months.

Since that time, members of RNA have been trying to overturn a Board of Adjustment ruling allowing this marble factory from operating in our residential neighborhood. It is incredibly ironic, that while we have been trying to stop this industrial enterprise from breaking our R-2 zoning, these people have been operating, what Newark Police Director William Celester has idenitified as, a "major [drug] supplier to the area of the Bradley Court Housing complex located at N.Munn and South Orange Avenue in Newark".

As for an update on the variance battle, the Board's April 23rd meeting was cancelled due to a lack of a quorum. It has been rescheduled for Thursday, May 14th. There will be court hearing on May 11th with Superior Court Judge Margulies and our lawyer, Robert DuVal.

COMING EVENTS

1) **RNA MEETING: TUESDAY, May 12th: 7:30 PM**
AT THE HARBOR VIEW HEALTH CARE CENTER

GUEST SPEAKER: Marty Robins of the NJ Transit

2) **Board of Adjustment hearing for 210 Ogden Avenue:** Thursday, May 14th: 6:00 pm at City Hall

3) **NEXT MONTH:**
TUESDAY, JUNE 9: RNA MEETING to be held at ASCENSION CHURCH (New York and South Streets)

[continuation of **MEETING MINUTES**]

The meeting was then opened to the floor and a number of subjects came up.

- A complaint was lodged about a persistent problem of large household furnishings being left on the sidewalk for the regular sanitation crews to pick-up.

- A suggestion was made that the basketball courts in Riverview Park NOT reopen at night when the park renovation is complete. Residents living near the park say all-night basketball courts are an excuse for teenagers from all over to come to this neighborhood and cause problems.Chairwoman Maria Tuzzo agreed to ask the city if there is any way, perhaps by turning off the lights in the basketball court area, of closing the courts at nightfall.

- And alarming stories were told of burglaries in the neighborhood over the past few months. In one case, the homeowner surprised the burglars in her home and two suspects were caught. Everyone who spoke agreed the police were not as responsive as they could have been.

Michael Gates won the monthly 50/50, and the meeting adjourned. This month rather than have refreshments at the end of the meeting, we took a mid-meeting coffee break and enjoyed cakes and cookies provided by our members.

We look forward to seeing you, newcomers and familiar faces, at our next meeting TUESDAY, MAY 12th at the Harbor View Health Care Center at 7:30 in the evening.

Margaret McCorry, Secretary

CHRIST HOSPITAL OVERWHELMS THE COUNCIL AND GETS THEIR PARKING LOT

On April 15th, at a special hearing, the City Council voted to uphold the Planning Board in their decision to allow Christ Hospital to use their cliff property as a parking lot, when they approved an ordinance to vacate portions of three city streets: Montague and Prospect Streets and Ogden Avenue. Christ Hospital stacked the room with their supporters - all wearing "I support Christ Hospital" tags. They were bused in from the Hospital using vans and coordinated with their private radio walkie talkie systems. It was obvious at the outset that the Hospital had garnered support amongst the Councilmembers. A last minute proposal by Councilperson Vasquez to postpone the hearing and form a committee of interested parties to further study the parking lot plan was greeted with loud "no"s by the many supporters.

A statement, on behalf of RNA, in opposition to the parking lot plan was read by Chairperson Maria Tuzzo. Other people speaking against the proposal were Hank Cesari, chair of RNA Planning and Development Committee, RNA member Gina Giambittista, Barbara Petrick, Terry Constantino and Tim Griffith of Palisade Avenue, Sal Riggi of the Jersey City Environmental Committee, city activists Louis DeStefano, Frank Delessandro and Joseph Duffy.

Those speaking in favor of the plan were for the most part employees or volunteers of the Hospital. Most notable among those were Lloyd Currier, President of Christ Hospital, political activist Vincent Moore of Prospect Street, and Joe Calendrillo, President of Hutton Street Block Association.

After approximately three hours of testimony, the Councilmembers, in rather long winded recitation, voted "yes" to vacate the streets. It should be noted that despite his initial proposal for a further study, Councilmember Vasquez voted in favor of the plan. The two Heights Councilmembers also voted for the plan. Mr. Waddleton, from the basis of his statement, voted for the plan because of the fine care and help he always receives at the Hospital. Mr. Rakowski, it seems went along with his constituents that were in favor of the parking plan rather than those that were against it.

Before announcing their vote, Councilmembers Rakowski and Vasquez in their statements went on record saying they would oppose any future plans that Christ Hospital may have for a multi-level building on this cliff site. This may be an empty gesture because the property in question is located in an R-4 zone and will probably only require a Planning Board approval - not a Council approval of any kind. Besides, who knows if either of these Councilmembers will even be in office when Christ Hospital comes back with their multi-level building proposals.

A better gesture on their part, would be to push for a R-2 zoning of the immediate area (restricting the height and kinds of structures allowed) and/or a steep slope ordinance (restricting all development above, below and on the cliffs themselves). Either of these constructive suggestions would help the residential members of this area of the Heights by insuring control over the kinds of buildings that can be put up in the future.

Regardless of the reasons, the Council's affirmative vote gives Christ Hospital a solid base on the Palisade cliffs to implement their long range expansion plans.

Maria Tuzzo

A RATHER LONG-WINDED OPINION:

Once again the local residents of Palisade Avenue have had to do battle with the administrators of Christ Hospital. As usual it was over the Hospital's expansion plans for additional parking. As usual it was a David and Goliath struggle.

The Hospital administration has consistently complained about a lack of adequate parking facilities for their patients, employees and medical personnel. (Their last plan, presented in 1989, included a multi-story parking garage jutting out over the Palisade cliff. That proposal was promptly rejected by the Planning Board.) The Hospital has always had a policy to expand - both for medical facilities and for additional parking. At first glance that seems an admirable policy - to provide and upgrade health care for the local community. BUT at one point the Hospital's plans and the needs and concerns of the local residents have clashed. It seems apparent from all indications that the Hospital is pursuing a relentless policy to expand to the detriment of the surrounding

residential neighborhood.

There seems to be a systematic and relentless campaign by the Hospital to eliminate the surrounding residential neighborhood to make way for their building and parking projects. In the past two decades, Christ Hospital has purchased one, two, and three family houses and apartments in the neighborhood, north and south of the hospital. In most cases, these are demolished and in all cases they come off the tax rolls because, the hospital pays no taxes. There are also indications that the hospital is extending their sights west. It has been learned that the City's proposed master zoning plan will change the zoning of corner properties opposite the hospital complex to accommodate the hospital's future development plans.

At this point, it should be stated why the residents are opposed to this expansion policy and specifically the building of additional parking lots. First, the more parking spaces that are built the more automobiles that can be accommodated. That means more traffic and more air pollution in the surrounding neighborhood. Anyone familiar with the area around the Hospital is well aware that traffic, at present, is unbearable. Second, the building of this parking lot and ultimately, other multi-level parking garages on the Palisade cliffs is an environmental disaster. By eliminating the open space on these cliffs, this policy not only destroys an natural barrier against the overwhelming air pollution from the constant traffic of the two tunnels but it also ruins an incredible viewing area of the Hudson River and the New York City skyline. (The Jersey City Environmental Commission had presented its opposition to this proposal with the Planning Board citing its concern with the adverse impact to the surrounding neighborhood. Unfortunately, it was disregarded by the Planning Board and one Board member actually had the audacity to imply that the Commission was improperly influenced by the community.)

At present, the Hospital is only asking for approval to expand their surface parking. However, this proposal is just the first phase of an elaborate master plan - which projects additional parking lots, some of them multi-level, along Palisade Avenue and the cliff for over 1,000 more parking spaces. Learning from the past, the administrators have decided to present their plan in piecemeal fashion - a little section every few years: an unethical way to gain official approval of their development plans. At the site plan review, the Planning Board obstinately refused to view this entire master plan of the Hospital.

It seems from these plans that the Hospital's continued expansion at the expense of the local community marks it as something other than a non-profit health care institution. It is beginning to look much more like a profitable real estate operation. Evidence of this is confirmed by the attitude of hospital officials who have often reminded the residents that this is private property and "they can do what they want with it - even put up high rises." This implied threat presumably would make the local residents accept the parking lots in lieu of the "dreaded high-rise".

We, the neighborhood, do not view the Hospital as an enemy. It should be noted that the Hospital's presence in the area has stabilized the surrounding neighborhood and for that we, the residents are all thankful. However, what we would like to do is persuade the present administration to change its long-term policy of accommodating the demand for more parking spaces for private automobiles. We believe that the Hospital could be convinced to seek alternatives to their present policy. Such alternatives could include satellite parking lots, shuttle buses, employee incentives for car-pooling and public transportation. These alternatives are all provisions of the Federal Clean Air Act of 1990 which will require all employers to adopt them in the near future.

In 1989, one of the many complaints, made by the residents, was that the Hospital administration was insensitive and out of touch with the local community. Well, that situation was quickly remedied when the Hospital adopted many of the suggestions of the local community BUT exploited them for their own aims. There began a media campaign to win the "hearts and minds" of the local community by showing that the Hospital really did care for its neighbors. There began publication of a hospital monthly newsletter, at first purporting to inform the local residents about the Hospital's future plans but instead turning into a monthly advertisement for their own "community services." They placed a local resident on their planning committee to provide community input, in the hopes of placating the residents. Finally they hired the services of a community liaison (an out-of-towner from New York City named Harry Schwartz) to "communicate and educate" the local neighborhood and block associations about the Hospital. (Recently there have also been questions about the Hospital providing financial backing for a "community newsletter" - The Jersey City Heights Neighborhood News. When confronted with questions about the extent of this financial support, both Hospital President Lloyd Currier and "anonymous" JCHNN publisher David Joy were evasive and non-committal. Of course, there is nothing wrong with a local newsletter accepting financial support from community sponsors BUT there is something wrong if that financing influences the newsletter's support for the Hospital's policies. How coincidential that the "community newsletter" allots the first two pages of each of its editions to an exact reprint of the Hospital newsletter.)

Even more insidious is the recent campaign of the Hospital to guarantee its victory against the residents. A letter addressed to all local Jersey City pastors, dated March 1, 1992, from a Rev. Richard P. Chasse, the Hospital's Director of Pastoral Care, asks them to "help us help you find a parking spot at Christ Hospital" and mobilize their congregations for the cause of parking lots. It discounts the legitimate concerns and needs of the local residential community by stating "any proposal made in good faith has been challenged by small interest groups, some of which do not live anywhere near the hospital." In effect, we, the local residents have been minimized as "small interest groups" who have no right to speak out about the future development of our own community.

There was also a large mail campaign by Hospital employees flooding the City Council with demands to pass the ordinance for vacating the streets. In addition, every visitor to the Hospital was presented with a petition to support the parking plan. It must also be remembered that this non-profit corporation, has considerable resources and a large staff of lawyers, engineers, and

planners who work year round to not only come up with these development plans but strategies to persuade the City to accept them "for the good of the community".

Finally, this influence has even extended to effecting City policy. Since July 1991, there has been a large cyclone fence placed across the entrance to Prospect Street and Palisade Avenue: the very street that the Hospital is asking to vacate for its parking lot. This was done before the Planning Board approval and obviously well before the official vacating of these streets by the City Council. It has been learned that the City itself, prematurally decided to close off the street in anticipation of the Hospital plan.

Well it finally came down to this: Christ Hospital was able to persuade the City Council to approve their parking plan. We always knew it would be an uphill battle. But we take solace that we are morally right in our position: defending our homes and neighborhood. We are also encourage by the fact that David eventually beat Goliath.

Vito Brunetti

CONRAD'S CORNER

One thing about Glenn Cunningham getting a $65,000. a year position and Tommy Smith having a $55,000. a year job - is that they both live and work in Jersey City and will spend their money in Jersey City.

The four hundred out of towners who work for the City spend their money in the suburbs. The same is true for most of the out of towners along the waterfront and the teachers. Our local merchants don't benefit from them because they take the train or bus to the suburbs. We have police guide them in and out in the afternoon for which they only pay thirty percent in taxes, while the rest of us in the Heights and other parts of the City pay one hundred percent, all of which is slowly but surely bankrupting the City.

Maybe the old time politicians were robbing us but they at least spent all their money in Jersey City so that the homeowners and merchants benefited from rents and businesses.

The present rent ceilings which went into effect around 1970 were to be removed if vacancies exceeded four percent. They are over ten percent now, bankrupting owners of property with mortgages, causing the present depression we are having now with rent ceiling buildings.

To overcome this dilemma our City Council must lower our taxes by getting rid of some twenty percent of our out of town work force. Although we had thirty percent more development, twenty percent is still vacant. There is no longer a need to have staffs of workers in City Hall marking time, waiting for it to come back again. With twenty percent less taxes, homeowners will be able to hold onto their houses. It will save the middle class who after all pay all out taxes. In the meantime we can let the Chamber of Commerce take care of development. With less taxes we can support our local merchants and make our little world go around again, charity, after all, does begin at home.

CONTRIBUTE TO OUR NEWSLETTER

RNA is soliciting material for our newsletter. We are interested in anything you as our readers are interested in. Would you like to thank someone? Maybe you would like to complain about something. How about suggestions to help improve our neighborhood or City?

There's always a recipe, whether it is a family heirloom or something you just found out about. Creative writing is always wanted - whether it is a poem, a short story or a memory about a local event or person.

HELP SUPPORT RNA

Don't forget to pay your annual membership dues for 1992. It only costs $3.00 a year to enjoy the benefits of joining Riverview Neighborhood Association. (Next year, 1993, the dues have been raised to 5.00 a membership.)

Official membership entitles people living within RNA's boundaries to voting privileges on all matters that are brought before the association at the monthly general meetings. For people living outside the area, membership dues entitle them to receive the RNA monthly newsletter and attend the monthly meetings as active non-voting participants.

Make your check payable to Riverview Neighborhood Association and mail it to 232 Ogden Avenue, J.C., N.J. 07307. Be sure to include your return address so that your membership card can be sent to you. Better yet, bring it in person to our next meeting, Tuesday, May 12th at the Harbor View Health Care Center.

FREE RADON TESTING PROGRAM

Jersey City's Health Division, in the Department of Human Resources, is inviting concerned people to participate in a radon test for their properties.By contacting the HAZMAT (Hazardous Materials) Program coordinator James Boor at 547-5285, an application will be sent to you to complete and mail to the Princeton Geophysical Services.

"Although Radon is not an inherent problem to Jersey City due to the sandy composition of its soil, this free testing Program will give Jersey City residents peace of mind by providing them with Test Reports specific to their properties."

Mr. Boor also encourages all citizens to contact his office if there are any other concerns about "our environment or information relative to crimes against our environment presently or in the future". Again, his office number is 547-5285.

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SEE YOU AT THE NEXT RNA MEETING ON TUESDAY, MAY 12TH, AT 7:30 P.M.

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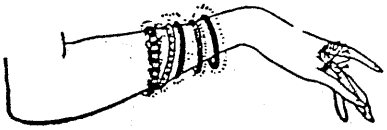

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COME TO OUR NEXT MEETING ON
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NJ TRANSIT'S WATERFRONT TRANSPORTATION PROJECT

Marty Robins, director of the Waterfront Transportation Project will be the guest speaker at our May12th meeting. He will discuss the present proposal for a 15-mile light rail system to be built along the Hudson River Waterfront extending from the NJ Turnpike's Vince Lombardi park-ride in Ridgefield south to Route 440 near the Jersey City/Bayonne border. There will also be an exclusive busway segment from the Turnpike to the Lincoln Tunnel.

This plan is expected to generate a ridership of approximately 90,000 daily trips and would also serve some of the lower income areas. Capital costs for contsruction are now estimated at $550 million.

There are two sections of this plan that affect our particular area. The first is the possible extension of a sub-corridor through Jersey City Heights and Union City. The second is whether the old Conrail River Line, below the Palisades, will be used as the location for the Hoboken segment.